

## Update

Today, perhaps more than ever, declining resources and budget reductions are requiring businesses to seek innovative solutions to organizational and productivity issues. One of the best ways to meet today's challenges is to support "creativity" by encouraging those who know the work best, to think about alternative ways of responding to unmet expectations and needs. Sometimes just asking a question, is a good beginning. For example, "Is this service continuing to meet our customer's needs? Is there a simpler, less costly, but better way to provide it?" Encouraging employees to consider alternatives, providing a safe environment for risk-taking, and encouraging creative thinking, are important aspects of discovering new solutions that can reduce processing time and deliver improved products and services.

In this newsletter, we will explore ways our organization has been moving along the path to performance improvement. You will have an opportunity to read Will's "Lessons from the Successful and the Absurd." Gary Mills will tell about his work unit's strategies for delivering more efficient and effective service delivery. And we'll provide you a variety of articles and share information about training opportunities that can personally help you contribute to a more creative workplace.

### **Where Does Innovation Come From? Lessons from the Successful and the Absurd**

By Will Rice

Public and private organizations are increasingly recognizing that human creativity is a critical source of sustainable improvement. The process of improving, learning, and recreating is essential for those who want to remain uncommonly successful.

The Department of Revenue has earned a national reputation as an agency willing to innovate and improve. Countless quality teams have repeatedly found ways to make a process faster that used to be slow, to improve a service, to take the drudgery out of something, or to figure out a way to save money and use resources more wisely. We've successfully harnessed complicated technology to make life better, both for ourselves as Revenue employees and for taxpayers.

As we look to the future, how can we make sure we remain uncommonly successful? The challenges in front of us are clear as we face increasing expectations and diminishing resources. What must we do if we want to remain a perennial "four-star" agency?

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*The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.*

*- Marcel Proust*

### ***Lessons continued from pg. 1...***

Much has been said about the need to think “outside the box.” That sounds fine, as far as it goes. But I am somewhat skeptical of that phrase because “out-of-the-box” thinking alone is not sufficient, and it certainly doesn’t guarantee success.

Take this example...

Who says cars have to have four wheels? Not Milton Reeves. In 1911, he invented the “Octo-Auto,” a car with eight wheels. Why? He believed the reason the ride on a train was so smooth was because trains had so many wheels. How did his invention fare? According to the era’s car critics, the extra four wheels made the car vibrate like a jackhammer at high speeds, and hard to turn even at slow speeds. His invention never made it onto the showroom floor.

Milton Reeves was an “out-of-the-box” thinker. But there were fatal flaws in his reasoning. Somehow he overlooked the fact that trains ride on smooth rails. And the roads on which he was testing his vehicle in 1911 more closely resembled horse paths than engineered railroad beds.

So where does successful innovation come from? I’m more impressed with the experience of Bill Bowerman, the running coach from the University of Oregon. Bill

was a fierce competitor and was always dreaming up ways to capture a competitive advantage. He calculated that if you could shave one ounce from a pair of running shoes, over the course of a one-mile race, a runner would be lifting two hundred fewer pounds.

Bill didn’t know much about sports apparel or running shoes. But he knew how to cook. One morning while making waffles, he got an idea: air pockets. Could you make a shoe that combined lightweight with strength by copying waffles? He was so inspired he ended up pouring synthetic rubber over his waffle iron to test the concept.

Bill Bowerman took his idea and founded the Blue Ribbon Sports Company. In 1972, the company changed its name to Nike.

Not all ideas are created equal. Both Milton Reeves and Bill Bowerman were “out-of-the-box” thinkers. But in putting their ideas to the test, one proved to be much more farsighted and sound than the other.

So what does a revenue-collecting agency need to do to encourage successful innovation? First, we need to be secure that our vision and goals chart the course for where we want to be. With clear vision, we can afford to be less preoccupied with all the

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### **Quality Update**

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# How to Create Your Own Kitty Hawk

## *Lessons in Invention from Two Average Guys*

<http://www.betterworkplacenow.com/wrightbros.html>

By Tom Terez

*“Daddy, you be Wilbur, I’ll be Orville. Let’s pretend we’re playing in our bike shop.”*

The evening before, my wife had tucked in our 4-year-old daughter by reading her a book about flying. The story must have filled her dreams that night, because bright and early the next morning, she wanted to role play. For an hour, we labored away in our imaginary workshop, cobbling together a flying machine out of paper, streamers, chairs, and sofa cushions.

That was a year ago, and at our daughter’s request, I’ve had other roles since then—Mufasa from *The Lion King*, Winnie the Pooh, Elvis, and a few others, none of which I’ll perform in public. But more often than not, I’ve been Wilbur and she has been Orville. And to this day, she can’t hear enough about that bicycle shop and their trial runs and that triumphant 12-second flight on December 17, 1903.

She has tinkered with paper, folding it every which way and tossing it out the upstairs window. She has taped strips of

balsa wood and flung them hopefully across the room. She has even made flying contraptions out of clay, which is why we have a deluxe vacuum cleaner. She is positively obsessed with invention.

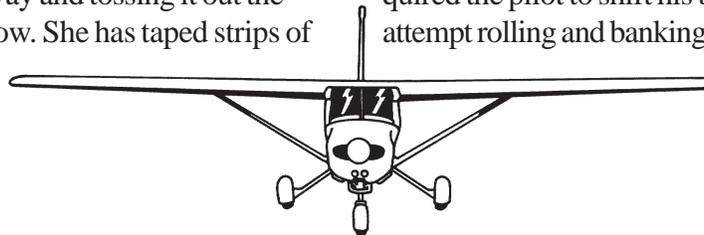
Along the way, I’ve learned all about the Wright brothers. It’s a fascinating story with

lessons for all of us—lessons that we can apply right now in our workplaces.

Wilbur and Orville were average guys from Dayton, Ohio. They owned a bicycle business, but they found themselves thinking more about wings than wheels. (Lesson #1—Have a vision.) So in 1899, they wrote to the Smithsonian Institution and gathered everything they could find about early efforts to fly. (Lesson #2—Do your front-end homework.)

They combed through every detail, searching for proven practices that would help their invention get off the ground. Other inventors had already demonstrated the aerodynamic wisdom of gliding, as opposed to flapping, and the Wrights followed their lead. In fact, they worked all sorts of earlier discoveries into their designs. (Lesson #3—Make the most of existing best practices.)

In other cases, facts and data convinced the brothers that they’d have to develop an entirely new approach—as in the case of lateral control. The prevailing method required the pilot to shift his body left or right to attempt rolling and banking. Orville and



Wilbur knew they’d have to find a better way. (Lesson #4—If the facts tell you to go against the grain, do it.)

Then the real work began. They analyzed what it would take to get airborne, and in the process, they pinpointed four problems that had to be solved: lift, control, power, and

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*We have three choices: we can innovate, imitate or hibernate.*

*- Marilyn Shoeman Dow*

### *Lessons continued from pg. 2*

traditional ways we've gone about conducting our business in the past.

Second, we can't be afraid of new ideas. We need to promote a culture in which there is a willingness to challenge our conventions, and one that cultivates new ideas. The value of a new idea is not always instantly obvious. As the Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu observed, "To see things in the seed, that is genius."

Of course not every new idea will produce a breakthrough. Some ideas produce cars with eight wheels. Just as we need to cultivate new ideas, we need to tolerate the dialog that will help us separate the eight-wheeled cars from the revolutionary running shoes.

Finally, we stand to gain by applying the discipline of the scientific method: forming

our hypotheses, testing them, and learning from our results. Where we find promise and success, celebrate, and expand it.



When a result doesn't live up to our expectations, learn from it and try something else offering greater promise.

We're living and working in challenging times. In the challenge, is the opportunity to harness our best thinking and find new ways to be uncommonly successful. As novelist Arthur Koestler noted, "The principle mark of genius is not perfection but originality, the opening of new frontiers."

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### *Kitty Hawk continued from pg. 3...*

learning how to fly. (Lesson #5—Divide big challenges into smaller challenges, and take them on one at a time.)

They built model after model, starting with kite-like gliders so they could test their ideas on lift and control. (Lesson #6—Experiment, experiment, experiment.) These gliders kept getting bigger as they fine-tuned their invention, and before long, they needed more space. We all know where they went: Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, where the Outer Banks offered perfect flying conditions.

Imagine telling your colleagues and family that you're going to haul your big kite to a windy beach so you can work out the kinks. Oh, and by the way, the beach is

500 miles from home. (Lesson #7—Do whatever it takes to achieve your vision. Ignore the naysayers.)

Each test flight provided a wealth of information, and the brothers methodically made improvements to their design. (Lesson #8—Great creations result from many small creations.) And in July 1901, the tethered glider was big enough and safe enough for a brave rider. Wilbur held on, everyone else pulled, and the glider soared across the sand. (Lesson #9—Sometimes it just takes guts.)

Plenty of work still needed to be done—not the least of which was this little problem of power. There was none. Gasoline engines at that time were too heavy to carry the plane and a

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*Kitty Hawk continued from pg. 4...*

person. So the Wright brothers turned to Charles Taylor, a mechanic extraordinaire who worked in the bicycle shop. Taylor led the effort to build a light-enough gas engine. (Lesson #10—Capitalize on all that nearby know-how.)

On September 23, 1903, Wilbur and Orville left Dayton and headed once again for the Outer Banks—bringing along their precious cargo, the “whopper flying machine,” as Wilbur called it. They spent that autumn using the glider version to sharpen their flying skills. (Lesson #11—Take the time to be prepared.)

Then winter came, and they felt the time was right for their maiden flight. They tried on December 14, but weak winds and an overeager tug on the elevator caused the “Wright Flyer” to hit the sand. Weather conditions prevented attempts the next two days, but December 17 seemed acceptable. Just four years after writing to the Smithsonian, Orville climbed onto the bottom wing, eased himself into position, and pulled the release wire. The rest is history.

The famous photo of that first flight is a story in itself. Orville and Wilbur felt so prepared, so optimistic, that they had a camera ready and waiting. (Lesson #12—At the moment of truth, throttle up your optimism.) An assistant had instructions to release the shutter just as the Flyer slipped the bonds of its launch track.

In the photo, Wilbur is standing on the sand, hunched forward, watching the

*Imagination is  
intelligence having  
fun.*

*- Anonymous*

airplane take off—not unlike the proud yet anxious parent who has just let go of a child’s two-wheeler. Look closely at the sand and you can see his footprints. They’re spaced far apart. He ran alongside his creation while it took flight.

Few of us will ever make the history books like Wilbur and Orville Wright. But we can all be inventors in our workplaces, applying the same lessons and achieving our own soaring results.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, I know one person who has her heart set on it: my daughter.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tom Terez is a speaker, workshop leader, and author of *22 Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace*. His Web site, <http://BetterWorkplaceNow.com>, is filled with tools for building a great work environment. Write to [Tom@BetterWorkplaceNow.com](mailto:Tom@BetterWorkplaceNow.com) or call 614-571-9529.

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## Department of Revenue's Telephone Information Center Performance Improvement

By Gary Mills

### The Problem

The Department of Revenue's Telephone Information Center (TIC) has a performance measure to answer 80 percent of all incoming calls in two minutes or less. The Telephone Information Center is busy throughout the year, but January presents special challenges. It is traditionally the busiest month for the TIC because annual, quarterly, and monthly excise tax returns are all due. It is also the time when the center receives calls from taxpayers inquiring about the use tax special notice mailed to 30,000 businesses. How, we wondered, would we meet our performance goal?

### The Solution

To reach our goal and ensure customer satisfaction, we analyzed our staffing levels and determined how to best use Agency personnel.

- We took advantage of new retirement regulations that allowed us to schedule intermittent employees to work more hours, especially at the end of the month when calls are traditionally heavier.
- We borrowed four employees from Taxpayer Account Administration (TAA) for part of the month.
- We shifted some "routine" work functions, such as address changes, to support staff.
- We cancelled our hour-long weekly sectional meetings during the month of January so telephones would not have to be shut down during that time.
- We asked our section's supervisors and leads to set aside their regular duties and place highest priority on answering calls.
- We created an automated "no tax due" number for taxpayers calling to report that they did not owe use tax.
- We rewrote our use tax special notice to emphasize calling the automated "no tax due" number if no tax was owed.
- We had a manager or a specialist from the Taxpayer Information and Education (TI&E) section complete callbacks so TIC supervisors could handle more calls.
- We recruited employees from the TI&E section to help out on the last day of the month when the call total reached 1,900.

***TIC staff answered  
24,066 in the month  
of January.***

*No great discovery was ever made without a bold guess. Isaac Newton.*



Innovation is alive and well at the Department of Revenue. Just look at the learning opportunities being provided by the “Shadow”! This busy fellow can introduce you to people who can help you improve your services or think about working relationships in new ways.

One recent participant, Diane Gibbs, used the experience to learn more about Unclaimed Property processes. The information Diane gathered will be used to provide insight and understanding for testing a new application. “Each person” she said, “gave me an overview of their piece of the puzzle, demonstrated the work and answered my questions.” The shadowing assignment also gave her “first-

hand knowledge of their current work processes, system glitches, work flow, as well as some of their expectations for the new system.”

If you haven’t already taken a look at the list of available mini job rotations, take a peek now.

**Please note:** If you’re interested in participating in a Shadowing assignment, contact the Administrative Assistant of the hosting division *before* registering for a Shadowing opportunity. Your conversation with the Administrative Assistant gives you an opportunity to better coordinate the Shadowing event.

To learn more about the available shadowing opportunities, click here: [http://dino/dorhome/Executive/Quality\\_Improvement/Shadowing/shadowing\\_assignments\\_homepage.htm](http://dino/dorhome/Executive/Quality_Improvement/Shadowing/shadowing_assignments_homepage.htm)

## Department of Revenue Quality Improvements Statistics:

The Department of Revenue has long had a commitment to Quality Improvement efforts. Look at our accomplishments from July of 1997 to the present!

<b>Total Department of Revenue savings since July 1997:</b>	
Dollars Saved	\$1,029,950
FTE Hours Saved	137,780
Revenue Generated	\$34,173,472
Savings to Others	\$4,236,258
<b>Department of Revenue savings from October – December 2002:</b>	
Dollars Saved	\$74,388
FTE Hours Saved	772
Revenue Generated	1,050,000
Savings to Others	\$0

*TIC continued from pg. 6 ...*

### The Result

We met our goal! During January 2003, more than 24,000 calls were answered. This was the highest number of calls ever taken in a single month. Of those calls, 82.5 percent were answered in two minutes or less.

Not only did we exceed our goal, but we did it in such a way that everyone benefited. Taxpayers calls were answered in a timely manner; the telephone agents were less stressed, and the support from others in the Agency strengthened interdivisional cooperation. Now that’s success!

*Creativity can solve almost any problem. The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality overcomes everything.*

*- George Lois.*

## Supervisor Learning Forums

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Supervisors, have you attended one of the Supervisor Academy Learning Forums? If not, this may be the time to join two small-group sessions that can enhance your effectiveness as a supervisor.

- ◆ May 22, 2003 – Sustaining a Motivated Workforce!
- ◆ August 21, 2003 – Creativity and Innovation

The facilitators for these sessions are Will, Ralph and Wendy. Those who have previously attended the Forums have expressed appreciation for the ability of these panelists to rejuvenate them and identify ways to create a positive work environment.

Listen to some of the comments from your peers and what they have learned about the importance of:

- ◆ “keeping a positive attitude and recognizing (that) I have the ability to choose my attitude”.
- ◆ “giving staff the opportunity to try things that may not work, but that the reaction to the outcome, good or bad, be supportive and encouraging.”
- ◆ “communication on a daily basis and making sure (staff) know what is expected and that they are supported”.

Join one of the sessions by registering through ATRS: <http://dorprodapps/TrainingSystem/>

## Lessons from Innovative Companies

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By Marcia Zidle

What do innovative companies like 3M, Polaroid and Walt Disney have in common? Are creativity and innovation the same thing? How do managers and team leaders cultivate and harvest innovation in their organizations? For the answers to these questions, click on the link below:

<http://www.powerpointers.com/printarticle.asp?articleid=472>

## A Creativity and Innovation Website:

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To learn about an organization that promotes creation and Innovation, check out :

<http://www.amcreativityassoc.org/pages/about%20us.html>